Not one of us asked to be born. We had no choice or say in the matter. There was no possibility of selecting our parents or our family. The time, place and circumstances into which we were born were determined without any help from us!

In this sense we are not born equally. Some are born into riches, loving homes, a Christian environment and security, while others are born into poverty, terror, faithless societies and injustice. There are all kinds of variations on this. The one equalising fact is that everyone born into the world is fully and immediately loved by God. His love is extended to us all (1 John 4:19). The journey through life to discover and fully enjoy that love is different for everyone, and the road is full of choices. God doesn’t force us into relationship with him. If, having had no say in being born, we decide to turn our back on him, we can. God allows us to exercise our free will. It’s not what he wants (1 Timothy 2:4), but he sees no virtue in forcing people to respond to his love.

On the other hand, the Bible shows that God’s love for us is so strong – so total – that he was able to demonstrate it to the fullest possible extent. Speaking of Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross, when he took the full weight of our sin on his shoulders, John 3:16 records, ‘God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.’ The story is not only one of sacrifice, it is also of victory. The resurrection of Jesus, which demonstrated his unequivocal power over death, makes eternal life possible for us all (1 Corinthians 15:57).

We can still turn our backs on such love, of course, either pretending it didn’t happen or rejecting it as not having been requested. But the outcome of God’s loving intervention through Jesus, is that we do have a choice in regard to being born – there’s a chance of a new birth that affects our ongoing and eternal life. Put simply, we are invited to be ‘born again’ (John 3:3). In the third chapter of John’s Gospel, Jesus speaks of two births – our natural one and a spiritual one (vv 5, 6). He tells us that the spiritual birth is essential to enter the Kingdom of Heaven (v 3). Whether we choose this or not is up to us. How does it happen? Jesus said it was a mystery – difficult to explain (v 8), but nonetheless totally effective...

The Holy Spirit comes in response to our repentance for wrongdoing. He comes to confirm our complete forgiveness and the opportunity of a fresh start. He comes to make a difference. He comes to give us direction, to teach and prompt us, to equip us by his powerful indwelling presence. The invitation is ours to make. Welcoming him marks the beginning of the holy life. His Spirit helping me...